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## The love of a family

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Sentinel-Standard writer

IONIA - Just in time for the holiday season, two families were made "official" in an Ionia County courtroom on Tuesday, which happens to be Michigan Adoption Day.

"We're happy," said Pam White of Belding, who was there to adopt her 19-month-old grandson Kaleb with her husband, Mel. "We're just ready to have it finalized and have him ours."

The Whites had previously adopted Kaleb's older sibling as well.

"We've been trying to adopt (Kaleb) since February," Pam said. The active, wide-



During the finalization of his adoption on Tuesday, 19-month-old Kaleb explored the courtroom, oblivious to the importance of that day. His grandfather, Mel White, who adopted him, is in the background. Sentinel-Standard/LAURA RICO

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eyed toddler has lived with the Whites since he was born, coming home with them from the hospital.

"Kaleb would have been lucky to have them as grandparents, but now he's even more lucky to have them as parents," said Ron Waite, adoption specialist with the Michigan Department of Human Services. Waite has been working with the Whites during the adoption process.

The Department of Human Services' Adoption Services Program provides services to children whose parental rights have been terminated because of child abuse or neglect, and to families who want to adopt.

While the adoption was being finalized by Ionia County Probate Judge Robert Sykes Jr., Kaleb wandered around the courtroom.

"Presiding over adoption finalizations is one of the most enjoyable tasks that I perform," Sykes said. "It's very rewarding to know that I am playing a small part in providing a child who has been subjected to abuse or neglect the permanency that all children deserve."

The next adoption that day was for siblings Skylar, 7, and Brandon, 5. They were being adopted by their grandparents, Terry and Linda Rottier of Alto. The Rottiers had previously adopted 10 children, and Skylar and Brandon, numbers 11 and 12, are the children of an adopted daughter.

"I have great respect for the adopting parents who pledge to provide their new child with life-long love and support oftentimes while raising other children," Sykes said.

The first to arrive for the Rottier adoption was April Miller, the biological half-sister of Skylar and Brandon, and the Rottier's first adopted child.

"They're wonderful parents," Miller, now an adult, said. "They adopted me one week before my fifth birthday."

Terry Rottier said he and his wife never planned to adopt 12 children. Linda Rottier was unable to have children after an operation she had in her twenties. They became licensed to take in foster children in 1979 - something Linda Rottier's parents had also done when she was younger.

Over the years, the Rottiers continued to adopt and take in foster children.

"We told everyone we were done adopting after six," Terry said. "But the Lord just kept bringing us these kids."

As for Skylar and Brandon, Terry said their mother did great until she was in her early twenties, then went downhill.

"She's been reaching out to us lately though," he said.

During the adoption proceedings, Sykes allowed the two newest Rottier siblings to sit at the bench, in his seat. They grinned with pride at their parents and siblings, who attended the hearing. He let both children sign their own names on the adoption paperwork.

"Would you like to say anything to your parents?," Sykes asked.

"Thank you," Skylar said quietly, but seriously.

"I think that says it all," Sykes said.

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